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ABSTRACT

Many American servicemen have married Asian women and brought them to the United States. Asian wife-American husband families are unique compared to black-white or European-American marriages because they are both interracial and cross-cultural. Yet, few studies have been done to analyze their relationships and problems in adjusting to American society. The present analysis is based on data from 50 Korean wife-American husband families in the State of Georgia, randomly selected from a list of 350 such families. The wife and husband of each family were interviewed from 1974 to 1975. The interview questionnaire included demographic information and questions relating to associating with Americans and Koreans, adjustment problems in America, relationship between wife and husband, and parents and children, social interaction patterns, and stability of the marriages. The responses were used to analyze the degree of social integration within the family organization and with outsiders. The findings indicate that Korean wife-American husband families confront four major problems: (1) the conflicts between wife and husband that are due to the differences in cultural values and socioeconomic background of Korean women before marriage; (2) communication problems of Korean wives; (3) conflict between mother and children; and (4) out-group relationships. (Author/JM)

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KOREAN WIFE-AMERICAN HUSBAND FAMILIES IN AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

As a consequence of World War II, the Korean conflict, and the Vietnamese war, many American servicemen married Asian women and brought them to the United States. According to data from the Immigration and Naturalization Services, between 1933 and 1974, 220,900 Asians entered the United States as wives of U. S. citizens. Of this number, 73,173 entered the United States between 1970 and 1974. More than 26,000 Korean wives of U. S. citizens have entered the U. S. since 1950, with approximately half that total having entered since 1970.

The number of persons entering the United States as Asian wives of U. S. citizens has been increasing steadily from 1946 to the present time. The continuous increase will be anticipated as long as American military installations remain in Asian countries. (See Table 2 for detailed figures.)

Asian wife-American husband families are unique compared to Black-White or European-American marriages because they are both interracial and cross-cultural. Yet, in spite of such a peculiar family organization and the increasing number of such marriages, few studies have been done to analyze their relationships and problems in adjusting to American society. For instance, Barron (1972) cites only one article on War-Bride marriages, whereas more than ten articles on inter-religious marriages were cited.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Works related to Asian wife-American husband families either in America or abroad are limited. Hunt (1957), Kim (1972), Lee (1972:109-139), Schnepp and Yui (1955), and Strauss (1954) are the major studies available in relation to Asian wives of U. S. citizens.

The limited studies on the Asian wives of U. S. citizens seem to be contradictory. Schnepp and Yui (1955) and Strauss (1954) seem to argue that although there are conflicts and strains that result from different sociocultural backgrounds and communication problems, the Japanese wife-American husband families are quite stable. However, they do not provide quantitative data to support the notion as Mohanan (1970) does regarding the stability of Black-White marriages.

Hunt (1957), Kim (1972), and Lee (1972:109-139), on the other hand, view the problems of Asian wife-American husband marriages as serious. Kim identifies the problems of Japanese and Korean wives of American husbands in terms of their socio-economic background, and Hunt and Lee identify the problems of either Philippine wife- or Korean wife-American husband families as conflicting cultural values combined with communication difficulties. They identify such families as marginal.

Although the findings herein are related to Korean wife-Caucasian American husband families, it is assumed that the findings may represent those which other Asian wife-American husband families confront.

METHODOLOGY

The author studied fifty Korean wife-American husband families in the State of Georgia. There are more than 1,000 Korean wife-American husband families in the area of Columbus, Georgia, because of the Fort Benning military installation. This author was able to compile a list of 350 Korean wife-American husband families in the area through the names and addresses obtained by the oriental food stores in the area and friendship network of the Korean women. Fifty families were selected randomly from the list, and the wife and husband of each family were interviewed by the author from 1974 to 1975.

The interview questionnaire included demographic information and questions relating to problems in associating with Americans and Koreans, adjustment problems in America, relationship between wife and husband and parents and children, social interaction patterns, and stability of the marriages.

The responses were used to analyze the degree of social integration within the family organization and with outsiders. This study is based on an assumption that the members of Korean wife-American husband families would confront problems that arise from different racial and cultural backgrounds between wife and husband.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate that Korean wife-American husband families confront four major problems: (1) the conflicts between wife and husband that are due to the differences in cultural values and socioeconomic background of Korean women before marriage; (2) communication problems of Korean wives; (3) conflict between mother and children; and (4) out-group relationships. (See Table I for the demographic data of the persons interviewed.)

The Conflicts Between Wife and Husband

One of the problems between Korean wife-American husband is that of role conflict. When Korean women and American men marry, most Korean wives expect their husbands to treat them according to the American way (72% of the sample), whereas most of the American husbands expect their wives to behave like Korean wives in Korea (54% of the sample). Thus, there is no consistent role performance and both wife and husband seem to take selfish advantage of the confusing situation.

Disciplining children seems to be a source of value conflict between wife and husband. Mothers appear to be strict and fathers seem to be permissive. This is the case when a Korean traditional value conflicts with an American value. (Eight out of sixteen couples who have children who are 4 years of age or older indicated this problem.)

Sources of conflict between husband and wife often include disagreement over such things as food selection and preparation, marital and sex roles, and the use of leisure time. Aggravated and prolonged, these antagonisms may lead to the most traumatic experience for the Korean wife: desertion, separation, divorce, and suicide. When this occurs in the life of a relative newcomer, her isolation becomes virtually absolute by the loss of her principle contact in her adopted society.

The author observed several cases in which American husbands took advantage of the poor socioeconomic background of their wives before marriage to achieve dominance over them, a relationship which is often reinforced by the necessary dependence of the wives on their husbands in alien environment they initially encounter after reaching the U. S. Sixty-five percent of the wives interviewed indicated that divorce may come at any moment particularly because of high divorce rate in the U. S. This was a hidden fear to many Korean wives.

Communication Problems

Communication seems to be the greatest problem for the Korean women (100% of the sample). Most Korean wives of American husbands made contact with Americans before marriage and learned some English. However, their English is generally poor and technical terms are beyond their comprehension.

Many Korean wives expressed frustration over their inability to communicate with their husbands and other Americans. The situation made them self-conscious and discouraged their social interaction. This author met with only one American husband of Korean woman who spoke fairly good Korean.

Lack of free communication may lead to misunderstanding which might unintentionally jeopardize interpersonal relationships. Because of communication problems, some American husbands tend to make arbitrary decisions, ignore their wives, or tend to avoid explaining things in detail to their wives (55% of the sample indicated this problem). Communication problems together with differences in cultural values seem to make their living more difficult in America.

Conflict Between Mother and Children

The problems with children seem to come from two major sources: (1) language communication problems, and (2) value conflicts between mother and children (five out of sixteen mothers who have children indicated this problem).

Korean wives of American husbands have a certain command of spoken English but almost no reading and writing ability. As children grow up, they confront situations in which linguistic help is needed from their parents. Mothers often face questions from their children concerning definitions of words, spelling, and pronunciation. In addition, children do not realize that their mothers do not fully understand English.

Some mothers expressed their concern over the socialization of their children. Sometimes their children complained about being teased by other American children who call them "Chinese." Sometimes society sees them as neither Americans nor Koreans. Racial and cultural differences between mother and father seem to create identity problems for the children.

Problems of Out-Group Relationships

Social relationships of Korean wife-American husband families seem to be more or less limited to homogeneous groups. According to the author's survey of fifty couples, only a few husbands joined voluntary organizations or clubs, and few wives joined church organizations. Husbands accompany wives for social interaction (74% of the sample), whereas few wives accompany their husbands (10% of the sample). This often leads to almost exclusive social interaction with other Korean wife-American husband families.

Many wives and husbands feel that there is a tacit segregation from both pure American families and Korean families. Some American husbands expressed the opinion that some Americans looked down on intermarried families (62% of the sample). Many Korean wives of American husbands also feel that homogeneous Korean families alienate Korean wife-American husband families (94% of the sample).

Although the majority of Korean wives have a driver's license, 28 percent of the sample did not. The driving of cars by women in Korea is particularly unusual, but many Korean wives learned to drive after they came to America. The ability to drive allows Korean wives the opportunity to shop and to interact with other Koreans.

Those wives who did not drive complained that they were too often isolated at home; they found waiting for their husband to return home to be tedious. Therefore, the inability to drive contributes to more isolation and suffering from sociocultural loneliness.

Probably one of the major problems of many Asians coming into America would be an erroneous concept of living in America. Most Asians come to America to live better but soon after their arrival, they find many problems of adjustment. They find that living in America is not easy. Many (more than 50 percent) of the Korean wives interviewed thought that they would gain wealth soon after arrival in America and that living in America would be much easier than in Korea. Now they realize that living in America is more difficult than in Korea because of the absence of a house maid. This becomes especially difficult if the wife works outside the home. Thus, many wives of servicemen urge their husbands to seek reassignment in Korea (31% of the sample). Economic abundance and technological advancement do not seem to compensate for the sociocultural problems of some Asian wives of U. S. citizens.

CONCLUSION

As Marcson (1950) pointed out, eventually intermarriages will accelerate the assimilation process because it will eliminate both biological and cultural visibilities. The present author believes that intermarriage may prove to be one of the most effective forces serving to minimize racial problems confronted by our pluralistic societies.

Intermarriage, however, is fraught with numerous problems which may lead to the disintegration of family and out-group relationships. The problems seem to be more serious when the wife is a new-comer to America due to language problems, cultural conflicts, and social stigma attached to the marriage.

Korean wife-American husband families experience value and role conflicts between wife and husband due to sharing different racial and cultural backgrounds. The structure of Korean wife-American husband is marginal not only because it consists of conflicting values which often lead to anomie in the system but also they experience social isolation from both Koreans and Americans.

The relationship between the mother and children is tense because the children constantly confront two different cultural systems, in two worlds, one represented by the mother and the other by the father and the community. This

situation seems to create identity problems for children. The relationship between mother and children is more tense when the mother does not have a good command of the English language.

Korean wives of American husbands appear to suffer more than their husbands because they have to struggle to adjust to a new way of living. In addition to their familial and societal problems, they are female, shy and hidden, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with an alien status which is often used by their husbands for dominance, and culturally not inclined to be socially active. They hesitate to appear in public. They are self-conscious because of communication problems and intermarriage. In addition to their socio-cultural and communication problems, Korean wives are also concerned about the possibility of divorce. They also experience frustration over the inability to achieve the goal they established before coming to the U. S. -- that of rapidly becoming wealthy.

This study suggests that Asian wives of American servicemen may well be the most disadvantaged and neglected minority group in America. In spite of their disadvantages, they are determined people, who are striving to survive and who are working hard day and night at clubs, restaurants, factories, and stores. Many of them have little knowledge of their rights as individuals and citizens. They are a unique

minority who need special attention. Their plight can be eased through constructive government action fostered by social scientists and informed public concern.

Table 1. Demographic Summary of Interviews with Fifty Korean Wife-American Husband Families.

Length of Stay in U.S. by Korean Wives (mean)	6.7 years
Mean Age	W - 30.6 H - 32.9
Mean Years of Schooling	W - 8.4 H - 12.7
Mean Family Income (20 out of 50 wives employed)	W - $ 2,522.00 H - $10,760.00
Mean Number of Children (29 out of 50 couples have one or more children)	1.4
Mean Number of Marriages	W - 1.6 H - 1.4
U.S. Citizenship by Wives	60%
Voting	.03% (only 1 person)
Possession of Driver's License by Wives	72%
Church Attendance (once a month or more)	W - 30% H - 34%

W - Wife

H - Husband

N - 50 (W)
50 (H)

Table 2

United States Department of Justice
Immigration and Naturalization Service
Washington, D.C.

IMMIGRANTS ADMITTED AS WIVES OF U.S. CITIZENS, BY SPECIFIED ASIAN COUNTRIES OF BIRTH:
YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 1933 - 1974

Year	Total Asia	China & Taiwan	Japan	Philippines	Korea[1/]	Vietnam[2/]	Thailand[3/]	Other Asia
Total	220,900	35,748	62,328	50,541	26,050	7,694	9,605	25,997
1974...	14,884	1,259	1,773	5,101	2,461	806	2,141	1,343
1973...	15,149	1,242	2,077	4,744	2,134	1,437	2,195	1,320
1972...	14,676	1,161	1,626	4,702	2,148	1,599	1,759	1,681
1971...	15,280	1,155	2,023	4,815	3,033	1,481	1,196	1,577
1970...	13,184	1,157	2,104	4,056	2,646	885	983	1,353
1969...	9,645	1,125	1,842	2,375	1,954	550	576	1,223
1968...	8,339	1,062	1,845	2,256	1,356	331	304	1,185
1967...	7,757	1,327	1,821	1,846	1,389	218	158	998
1966...	7,346	1,296	1,991	1,611	1,225	100	81	1,042
1965...	8,058	1,471	2,350	1,518	1,281	82	83	1,273
1964...	8,008	1,535	2,653	1,371	1,340	71	50	988
1963...	7,983	1,471	2,745	1,445	1,350	33	25	914
1962...	7,038	1,377	2,677	1,373	692	14	14	891
1961...	7,147	1,340	3,176	1,343	405	6	17	860
1960...	7,846	1,027	3,887	1,481	649	2	11	789
1959...	8,339	1,345	4,412	1,268	488	5	1	820
1958...	7,968	980	4,841	1,063	410	2	1	671
1957...	7,891	904	5,003	1,069	288	4	1	622
1956...	6,520	1,055	3,661	934	292	3	4	571
1955...	5,496	909	2,843	958	184	3	3	596
1954...	4,979	787	2,802	788	116	1	2	483
1953...	3,902	722	2,042	675	96	1	-	366
1952...	6,281	959	4,220	667	101			334
1951...	1,651	826	125	390	11			299
1950...	1,716	1,062	9	352	1			292
1949...	3,824	2,143	445	807				429
1948...	4,977	3,192	298	890				597
1947...	2,042	902	14	559				567
1946...	629	159	-	-				470
1945...	67	11	-	-				56
1944...	28	10	-	-				18
1943...	19	3	-	-				16
1942...	54	21	4	-				29
1941...	202	121	5	27				49
1940...	246	122	1	15				108
1939...	305	135	2	12				156
1938...	312	110	3	9				190
1937...	243	80	-	8				155
1936...	182	54	1	5				122
1935...	238	51	2	7				178
1934...	180	31	1	-				148
1933...	269	49	1	1				218

1/ Data not available prior to 1950
2/ Data not available prior to 1953
3/ Data not available prior to 1953

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